

Should I wear a mask to have sex?

Sarah Sobanski

Having sex with someone outside your pandemic social circle or household will increase your risk of catching COVID-19.

That's the word coming from Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit [after B.C. health officials started people talking about using "glory holes" to practise safe sex during the global pandemic last week.](#)

"It's essential to reduce the risk of sustained close contact where droplets could be shared between the two partners," says Denise Smith, manager of health protection for the local health unit, citing people engaging in sexual contact with partners outside of their bubbles during the pandemic.

And yes, that could include "glory holes," whether in a fixed or portable wall, as seen popping up on social media marketplaces.

"It's up to the individuals how that is accomplished," Smith says. "Any time we engage in sex, we need to make informed and consensual decisions while also being safe and taking precautions – now more than ever during COVID-19."

For folks without long-term partners, or anyone who's felt the strain of isolation after the last few months, are there ways to lessen the risk and get back on the hunt for love even as the province inches toward getting back to normal?

Smith manages the health unit's sexual health clinics. She says the pandemic has changed the way we interact, but finding fulfilling relationships can be important for our mental, social and emotional well-being.

"This is especially true when many of us have been isolated or apart from others over the past few months," she says. "But as more things reopen and people get out more, we need to continue taking precautions to prevent the spread of COVID-19."

Smith points out COVID-19 is spread through close contact between people, so in-person dates increase the risk of spreading the virus. Her first recommendation is to hold off on an in-person date with a new love-interest. Opt instead for a virtual date.

"There are also neat ways to make virtual dates more meaningful, such as arranging to cook the same recipe, eating takeout that you ordered from the same restaurant (and) watching the same movie," she says.

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If you do decide on an in-person date, check with the person you're meeting to make sure they aren't feeling sick. Consider scheduling your date outdoors at a park or restaurant patio and observe recommended COVID-19 safety measures, such as physical distancing and wearing a face covering.

Smith doesn't recommend taking things home with a new partner. She says sexual contact isn't recommended with the ongoing pandemic.

“If you continue or start a sexual relationship with someone outside of your household during COVID-19, you and your partner face an increased risk of spreading the virus,” she says. “Remember that you are your safest sex partner during the COVID-19 pandemic.”

That said, Smith recognizes “consensual sex can be a way of dealing with anxiety... or a way to fulfil/express our needs for intimacy. It can also be pleasurable and help pass the time when isolated from others.”

She says if you decide to engage in consensual sex with someone new, it's important to remember that if your partner has COVID-19, there's a good chance you could get it due to close contact.

Along with usual safe sex precautions — such as wearing a condom to prevent HIV, sexually transmitted infections, and unplanned pregnancy — Smith recommends wearing a mask as heavy breathing during sex can create more droplets that may transmit COVID-19, and/or choosing positions that limit face-to-face contact.

She says it's important to avoid or limit kissing or exchanging saliva as well, and wash everything: your hands, your body and any sex toys (don't share) before and after sex.

Anyone with questions or concerns about their sexual health can call the health unit at [1-866-888-4577](tel:1-866-888-4577) ext. 1205 to speak to a sexual health nurse. The health unit's sexual health clinics are resuming soon.

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